

Country fiche: FINLAND

Position of civil society involved in the Roma Civil Monitor

SUBSTANTIVE POLICY AREAS

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-primary education is compulsory one year before preceding the start of compulsory education. Roma children attain it mainly at the public day-care centres provided by the municipalities regardless of their parents' working status. • Two ministries published materials both in Romanes and Finish to support parents in their children's early education at home. • The national agency for education has published several surveys regarding Roma education. • ESF-funded national projects aim at tackling challenges of Roma education; activities include promotion of education, skills and life-long learning among Roma. • Employment of Roma mediators in some schools has proven positive impact on Roma children's education outcomes. This new tool is expanding rapidly. • National Agency of Education has a special Roma unit, which researches on and promotes Roma's education. • Roma children are not segregated in separate own schools and classrooms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School enrolment depends on residence in catchment area; this is a problem for Roma from other EU countries or third courtiers without permanent housing. • Despite good quality of the Finnish educational system, Roma children face problems in schooling. Lack of Roma's recognition and higher absenteeism seems to be causes of their lower performance. • Roma are overrepresented in special classroom settings. • Support to Roma children's education should transfer from the project-based approach towards permanent supporting measures and policies. • School authorities should collaborate more with the local Roma civil society to overcome challenges in Roma children education. |
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EMPLOYMENT

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus is mainly on social services. • There are several new (ESF-funded) pilot projects to activate Roma, some have a strong outreach element. • The legal provisions against discrimination in accessing employment and at workplace exist and are monitored. • Equality Act obliges every public employer to have an equality plan. • Media campaign was launched to raise awareness on the problem of discrimination and antigypsyism in labour market. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approaches developed in the pilot programmes are not transferred to the mainstream employment services. • The discrimination by employers against Roma is high, but rarely reported. • The funding for Roma-specific programmes is unstable. |
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HEALTHCARE

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the partial exception of undocumented immigrants, access to health care in Finland is extensive, services are of high quality and equitable. • A study on Roma's wellbeing "Roosa," was conducted. It included a health examinations and tests (both somatic and mental). • Roma policy focus on social and health services towards the Roma with better coordination and culturally sensitive approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The training of health care professionals should include the development of practical multicultural skills. • Providing better professional guidance and care concerning health care of young families and early childcare. • Health issues related to domestic violence should be of a higher priority. |
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HOUSING

- Local and central policies have been designed to answer Finnish Roma housing needs for decades.
- The gap of equal access to the housing between Roma and the ethnic Finns and other groups has been closing up.
- There are monitoring and negotiation mechanisms in place to balance out accessibility and discrimination issues.
- The cutbacks in the housing allowances have increased the need to replace the housing for smaller and cheaper ones, which, coupled with the location of cheaper housing units pushes some Roma families into poverty hit neighbourhoods.
- There is no permanent and sustainable solution to the problem caused by undocumented immigrants or immigrants without permanent housing or begging Roma people, and not enough willingness to solve the problem, beyond NGOs that assist people living in illegal settlements.
- Despite some improvement, surveys indicate that Roma still experience discrimination in accessing private or public rental housing.

HORIZONTAL MEASURES

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

- The task of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is to promote equality and to prevent discrimination. It is an autonomous and independent authority and in 2014 it replaced the Ombudsman for minorities, which since its establishment had specifically promoted Roma issues.
- General obligation (for municipalities, all administrative levels and larger employers) to carry out equality planning was introduced from 1 January 2018. Plans are monitored by the Non-discrimination Ombudsman's office.
- Legal Aid service is available for all citizens. Roma NGOs are familiar with the system and can guide their clients.
- Roma are prominently involved with the existing anti-discrimination campaigns, run mostly by the non-governmental associations.
- Since 2014, Roma issues had no longer been reported in Ombudsman's annual reports separately; instead they are included in among other cases of discrimination regarding all ethnic groups.
- Discrimination experienced by Roma is considered underreported.

FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM

- Roma are involved in mainstream campaigns against hate crime and hate speech.
- Authorities have put some efforts into encouraging hate crime victims or witnesses to report the offences to the police (it is however not clear if this information reaches Roma).
- Antigypsyism should be recognised by the state, which could then result in the creation of initiatives to combat the phenomenon, and should be planned and implemented together with Roma associations.
- It is only discrimination as one of the manifestations of antigypsyism, which has been, although as a footnote, recognised by the NRIS. This should be addressed by the Advisory Board on Roma Affairs.
- Large percentage of Roma who face antigypsyism do not report cases to anybody.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC NEEDS OF MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS AMONG ROMA

- The measure on mandatory participation in pre-school education (in force from 2015) improved the attendance rates of Roma children.
- The NRIS for 2010-2017 provided awareness raising initiatives among the Roma on gender roles within the family; moreover, municipalities were encouraged to arrange sport opportunities for Roma women whose
- There are no measures supporting NEET youth in attaining professional skills at an older age.
- No measures have been adopted to address (explicitly) Roma LGBT+ issues.

involvement is limited in this field due to cultural restrictions.

- The NRIS for 2018-2022 highlights the gender aspect of the NEET youth phenomenon (men are overrepresented).

STRUCTURAL MEASURES

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

- A permanent National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs (formerly Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs) was formed in 1956.
- National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) is another structure responsible for Roma inclusion. Both NRCP and Board are under the same ministry.
- National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is responsible for formulating the National Roma Policy, ROMPO.
- As the representatives of the Ministries are members of the Advisory Board, the Roma Policy is incorporated into the sectoral strategies of each Ministry.
- Another governmental agency relevant for Roma inclusion is the Finnish National Board on Education, where a unit for Roma education - Education Unit for Roma, was established.

- National Advisory Board is composed of representative of ministries and Roma representatives, who are sometimes connected to public authorities.
- National Advisory Board faces criticism for an elitism in Roma representation.

CIVIL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- National Advisory Board is appointed by the Government and half of its members are of Romani background.
- A survey was sent out to different NGOs and other institutions working with Roma related issues in order to understand their involvement in the formulation, implementation and the follow-up processes with the current Roma Policy.
- The possibilities to participate in the planning process of policies were predominantly regarded positively.

- The problem with Roma politics and policies is low participation, with exception a small group, often connected to public authorities.
- Power relations play a significant role. Also, the absence of women, youth and “minorities within the minority” in Roma politics and policies was indicated.

MAINSTREAMING OF ROMA INCLUSION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- There are currently four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs (the 5th is under preparation) which are placed under the Regional State Administrative Agencies. From December 2017 Regional Advisory Boards on Roma Affairs operate on a new legal basis (not only governmental decree).
- Their aim is to ensure the hearing and participation of Roma living in different parts of Finland in the decision-making processes regarding Roma issues such as housing, welfare, education and employment.
- Due to the initiatives of Regional Advisory Boards or by the municipalities, there are Local Roma Working Groups active in 20 municipalities. The municipalities invite local Roma and/or representatives of local Roma NGOs a few times a year to meet with the key authorities of the municipalities.

- The top-down approach is not reaching the local Roma; the empowerment from bottom-up is the next step to promote Roma inclusion.

DATA COLLECTION

- Steering groups of the national surveys on Roma issues, for example on housing, health, education, employment, which

- The ethnic registration is prohibited in Finland, so the data is not always easy to find.

have been conducted by different Ministries or other actors, usually include Roma.

- Advisory Board on Roma Affairs along with the Regional Advisory Boards and Education Unit for Roma are estimating the basic data, e. g. how many Roma live in some areas, how many children are attending basic education etc.
- A comprehensive population study “Roosa” was conducted (see “Example of promising practice” below).

FUNDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- Mainly, the Romani NGOs receive funding from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations (STEA).
- At the local level there is also funding from the municipalities, for example, for preventing marginalization, or to organize events for different groups.
- There is an ongoing national Roma consortium project (2016-2018), funded by the European Social Fund. This project is a transformation of the Roma Policy into the local action plans, meaning that the aims of the project was adapted from the National Policy on Roma. This project followed the principles of participatory practices recommended by the funder.
- The challenge is that many NGOs do not have enough knowledge to apply or do not have administrative capacity to take care of the needed accounting or payroll services, or they do not have their own funding which is demanded.

EXAMPLE OF PROMISING PRACTICE

National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) conducted a population study Roma Wellbeing Study *Roosa* among the Finnish Roma between 2016 and 2018 and published at the beginning of 2019. The aim was to collect comparable data in order to strengthen equal treatment of Roma by developing culturally sensitive, yet universal services within social and health services system. The study was part of a large ESF-funded project *Nevo Tiija* project aimed at social inclusion and employment of Roma. The *Roosa* study has been conducted with Roma representatives, because there was still not enough comparable data of the services and the quality of them in Roma context. It included 365 participants and community meetings. Most of the participants participate also in the health examination (blood pressure, heart rate, height, weight, waist circumference, test of cognitive functions (verbal fluency, memory test), hand grip strength test, joint function tests, chair stand test, eyesight tests (near and distant vision) and Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) of psychological symptoms. Moreover, a structured face-to-face interview or self-filled questionnaire included questions of socio-economic status, housing conditions, employment, education, health, experiences of discrimination, use of services, and self-reported functional ability and health.

MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED

- System of circular representation in advisory boards at all levels is recommended to guarantee diversity among Roma representatives.
- The ROMPO should be better connected to the local level policy-making. A bottom-up approach in ROMPO development would concretize the needs at the local level more efficiently and local actors should be more strongly involved, and resources should be directed to the local level.
- Diversity among Roma is not expressed in the Roma Policy. According to the feedback, there is an absence of women, adolescents and other “minority within minority’s” representation. These points should be stated in the National Roma strategy.